Q. Dr. Stanley, I often travel through the small towns of Alberta and get talking to the people about the tremendous changes in public health over the last forty years. Every town seems to be well served with doctors and dentists, and most of them have their own hospitals. They tell me diseases like diphtheria and typhoid, which were once so common, have practically disappeared in the west . . .

A. Yes, and there have been great changes and improvements even in my own time. Why, when I came to High River in 1901, I was one of two doctors between Calgary and Macleod -- a distance of nearly 150 miles.

Q. You must have had some pretty long trips then?

A. Yes, and some pretty strange ones. I got an idea of what I was in for before I ever got to High River. The railway south from Calgary was only newly constructed, and it wasn't very reliable. There had been some heavy rains that summer. South of Calgary, near Midnapore the track went through a slough and nobody had seen the rails for several months. The engineer had to carry a big supply of wood soaked in oil. He floated this under the boiler and kept up steam while he went through the slough.

The day I set out for High River, it was snowing -- that was in August, mind you! When the old C. P. R. Engine No.32, made famous by the late Bob Edwards, tackled the De Winton hill, the brakeman and conductor went ahead with brooms to sweep the snow off the tracks, so that the wheels would grip.

Q. That was a very harrowing introduction for you, doctor. But I bet they gave you a fine welcome when you got to High River . . . .

A. Well, I got a very businesslike one. The moment I got off the train, I was driven to see a boy with a bad case of quinsy. I had no instruments but I washed my hands and timidly felt his throat. Luck came my way; my nervous finers broke the abscess, and in a few minutes the boy was well on the road to recovery. So, on my first case, I was away to a good start.

Q. Then you went home to get settled, I suppose . . .

A. Well, I went back to town but there was another man waiting there for me. He was a well-known character, who wanted a couple of teeth extracted. "I want them both out," he said, pointing to a couple of upper molars. I had only one pair of incisor forceps but I tackled the task. I fastened on to the back molar and started. The forceps slipped and lodged between the two offending molars -- and out they came as clean as a whistle.

I had thus performed two notable operations, and my reputation as a brilliant surgeon was fully established.

Q. You came west after graduating at Toronto, did you not, doctor? You must have found life in pioneer Alberta very different.

A. Yes, I ran into those differences as soon as I arrived. The day I got to High River, there was a big game of blackjack going on. It lasted 24 hours and at the end of it, the loser owed the winner over $21,000. He paid off with a house and property in town, a team of fine mares, and 30 acres of valuable lots in the townsite.

Q. Those were the great days for cattlemen and cowboys. Did you have much to do with the cowboys?

A. Well, there's many a cowboy riding around today that I brought into

the world. Cowboy's work wasn't a mere job; it was a dignified profession. I remember one lad who drifted into High River when a round-up was over, looking for something to do. R. A. Wallace was installing his irrigation ditch just then and he told the lad he could have a job on the business end of a shovel. "All right, Dick," replied the cowboy with dignity greatly hurt, "but I don't think you've got a horse quiet enough for me to dig off!"

Q. When you started practising, Doctor, how did people get word to you when you were wanted?

A. Usually a messenger would ride a saddle horse into town, and sometimes they had a pretty wild trip. Later the barbed wire phone came into use.

The barbed wire phone was a pretty good system in its way, though I must admit the modern telephone system is a lot more reliable. The barbed wire system was a home-made affair and the line was mostly the unbroken strand ofwire fence running along the farm fences. It worked pretty weel, except in wet weather. I've had barbed wire telephone calls from 20 to 30 miles away.

Q. You did all your travelling in the horse and rig?

A. Most of it. That was a good way to travel. A well-trained team would always get one home all right, and one could sleep on the way. The greatest difficulty on the out-trip was generally in locating the patient. Eventually I learned that a fairly safe method was to get directions from a local farmer -- and then take the other road.

Q. How did you get across the rivers?

A. They had to be forded for the most part. That was easy in low water but treacherous business in flood-time . . . particularly when the

water submerged the democrat and the horse had to swim for it. The high water was bad enough, but to hit the exact landing spot on the opposite bank was even more difficult. On one such trip I met a rider on his way to High River for a coffin. His brother had just been drowned in the stream I was about to ford.

Q. You mentioned just now that some of your trips took several days, doctor. Didn't that cut into your time pretty heavily?

A. Well, you must remember life was taken more easily then. A fellow could even get in some good fishing on the side when he was waiting around for a new arrival. Did you ever sleep at a table?

Q. No, I can't say I have.

A. Well, I must have done it a thousand times. In some pioneer homes you had to choose between rolling into a bed of which you were not so sure, or sleeping at a table. I chose the table.

Q. You mean sleeping ON a table?

A. No. The idea was to sit on the chair and to pillow your head on the table. It doesn't sound very enticing but you can have a fairly comfortable berth that way when you know how.

I remember one such night when we were awaiting a new arrival. The morning came and all seemed off. Decidedly out of sorts, I went for a stroll along the road. Meanwhile a dignitary of the family church summoned in the emergency, administered the ceremony of "the laying on of hands." Before I could do that hundred yard dash, the babe was born without assistance -- and my reputation was supplanted.

Q. Talking about tables --- you must have used them quite often for operations?

A. Yes, but the operation I remember best was done on a hen house door. I had driven 70 miles to attend a big Irish lad living in a little shack of a home. He had a ruptured appendix and general peritonitis. I had instruments enough but no operating table. He was too big for the kitchen table. We commandeered the hen house door and put that on top of the kitchen table. He called on me several months ago with his six feet three inches still intact.

Q. That's one thing about being a doctor. Your past accomplishments keep bobbing up again . . .

A. That's true. I keep on seeing men I brought into the world, and men whose fathers I brought into the world. I get other reminders, too. I drove down to Mosquito Creek many years ago to see an old man who was very ill. He insisted I should draw up a will. This was a new one on me, but my father had been a pretty good conveyancer, and I thought I could remember the right legal phrases. I pulled off some scrap paper and transformed it into a legal document. It wasn't needed then, for he recovered. But 15 years later when he died, my pioneer work of legal art was duly probated to the amusement of my legal friends.

The doctors of those times had to work under very difficult conditions. I remember going to one emergeny dase 30 miles out of town. I drove my team and drove 'em fast -- foundered one horse, a beauty. I never used him again. Well, I arrived at a tiny shack on the bald-headed prairie. The sun was blazing hot, the lumber in the shack had warped and had split the paper pasted over the cracks as a protection against the millions of mosquitoes that infested the place.

The patient was an obstetrical case -- seriously ill with toxemia, and with only an old lady to look after everything. There wasn't

a drop of water in the place: just a camp stove. The nearest water was a quarter of a mile away in a slough. I got there and found it was stagnant. Well, I took some up to the shack and boiled it as best I could. We operated -- the old lady acting as anaesthetist -- and the mother and baby lived. It cost me a good horse and all my effort -- but I hope it will help me get into heaven.

Q. I suppose the pioneer people placed a great deal of faith in their doctor?

A. Yes, they were most loyal and cooperative. Pioneers were never milk and water backers . . . they stuck! They never forgot the things the doctor had done for them. They didn't expect the doctor to perform impossibilities and they didn't call him unless it was something important and all their home remedies had failed.

Q. You say the doctor was called after home remedies had failed . . . I suppose the early settlers of Alberta had many of these home remedies?

A. Yes, most homes were equipped with them. Some were practical and some were utterly worthless. For example, a burn would be treated with soft soap lather, or white of egg. To stop bleeding, a wound would be plugged with tobacco cud. These and similar measures may have served a purpose, but other remedies were foolish and even harmful. For example, it was widely believed that a man could avoid getting rheumatism by wearing a copper wire around his waist. A sore throat, they believed, could be cured b y wrapping a used stocking around it -- the more used the better. A warm fleece, just taken off a live sheep was considered a sure cure for pneumonia.

Q. I suppose most of these superstitions have died out?

A. Yes, fortunately, they are passing away, though some seem to have amazing powers of survival even in the homes of some of our city gentry. All in all, though, there has been a remarkable improvement in the health of the country people over the last four decades.

You asked about typhoid for example. We rarely see a case today, but only 30 years ago, about half my cases at certain seasons of the year, would be typhoid. Diphtheria has almost disappeared. Revolutionary advances have transformed the practice of medicine and surgery from an art to an exact science.

Q. The old-time doctor is disappearing then . . . you don't see his hor se and buggy rolling over the prairie any more . . .

A. Yes, he's disappearing, and along with him, a tradition disappears. He didn't have much equipment, but he lived and moved among people who loved and honored him. He was the family friend; the innermost secrets of every home were entrusted to him and safely respected. His patients had a faith in his ability and integrity that was of tremendous value to him in his work.

He may not have been well equipped according to present day standards, he may not have been a very good businessman; but he was a happy man, doing his own kind of work. He never refused a call. No trip was too long; no night too cold for him to set out with his faithful team.

Q. I don't think this generation of Alberta people have forgotten him, Doctor, and I think they will pass on word to their children about the work he did. Perhaps we can quote the words of a man you knew well, the famous Bob Edwards . . .

"He may have been green . . . but no man can say he was yellow."